Sudanese army claims breaking long-running RSF siege

KHARTOUM: The Sudanese army said on Monday it had broken a long-running siege of Dilling in South Kordofan, where paramilitary forces had choked off access for more than a year and a half.

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in a conflict between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that has killed tens of thousands of people.

The war has also uprooted some 11 million people and triggered what the UN describes as the world's largest displacement and hunger crisis.

In its statement, the army said its forces "succeeded in opening the Dilling road after carrying out a successful military operation", claiming they had inflicted "heavy losses" on the RSF.

The army's advance has secured its hold over both the northern and southern approaches to Dilling.

The push around Dilling comes as the army attempts to stem a sweeping paramilitary advance across the wider Kordofan region.

Backed by the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement and led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu, the RSF shifted its focus eastward after seizing the army's last stronghold in western Darfur last October.

Since then, the paramilitary group has tightened its grip on West Kordofan, taken Heglig - home to Sudan's largest oil field - and intensified its siege of famine-hit Kadugli, the capital of South Kordofan.

Atrocities surged following the RSF's capture of El Fasher, with reports of mass killings, abductions and widespread looting. The UN has warned that similar abuses could spread into Kordofan.

More than 65,000 people have fled the Kordofan region since October, according to the latest UN figures.

A UN-backed assessment last year already confirmed famine in Kadugli, which has been under RSF siege for more than a year and a half.

The assessment said conditions in Dilling were likely similar, but security issues and a lack of access have prevented a formal declaration.

Three million return home

More than three million Sudanese people displaced by nearly three years of war have returned home, the United Nations migration agency said on Monday, even as heavy fighting continues to tear through parts of the country.

Since April 2023, Sudan has been locked in a devastating war pitting the regular army against the RSF.

The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people and created what the UN describes as the world's largest displacement and hunger crisis. At its peak, the war had displaced around 14 million people both internally and across borders.

In a report released on Monday, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said an estimated 3.3 million displaced Sudanese had made their way back home by November of last year.

The rise in returns follows a sweeping offensive launched by the Sudanese army in late 2024 to retake central regions seized earlier in the conflict by the RSF.

The campaign culminated in the recapture of Khartoum in March 2025, prompting many displaced families to try to go back.

According to the IOM, more than three-quarters of those returning came from internal displacement sites, while 17 percent travelled back from abroad.

Khartoum saw the largest number of returns -- around 1.4 million people -- followed by the central state of Al-Jazira, where roughly 1.1 million have gone back.—AFP

Submersible search yields cocaine haul

LISBON: Portuguese authorities said on Monday they had seized a record haul of cocaine from a semi-submersible craft intercepted off the Azores archipelago.

The nearly nine tonnes of the drug is "the biggest seizure of cocaine ever in Portugal", a police spokeswoman said.

Officers said they intercepted the craft "in recent days" some 230 nautical miles (426 kilometres) from the islands in the Atlantic Ocean.

They were assisted by the navy and air force, as well as the UK and US authorities, in difficult weather conditions.

The submersible eventually sank with 35 of the 300 packages of drugs it was carrying, the police said.

It originated in Latin America and had three Colombians and a Venezuelan on board, it added.—AFP

KP urges Centre to release Rs54bn dues

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support of temporarily displaced persons. He stated that those were national responsibilities; however, the financial burden continued to be borne disproportionately and unsustainably by the province.

He urged the federal government to take immediate corrective action, including full and unconditional release of all outstanding federal dues, particularly routine monthly NFC transfers, net hydel profit, oil and gas royalties and allocations for merged districts, strictly in accordance with constitutional provisions and agreed fiscal arrangements.

He cautioned that any further delay would only compound the province's fiscal stress and weaken governance capacity at a critical juncture.

PEDESTRIANS walk on a snow-covered street in New York City.—Reuters

Winter storm snarls US travel, disrupts flights

WASHINGTON: A powerful winter storm sweeping across much of the United States forced airlines to cancel thousands of flights and delay many on Monday, as freezing rain and heavy snowfall disrupted travel and snarled transportation networks.

About 5,300 flights were cancelled and more than 4,300 delayed as of Monday afternoon, FlightAware data showed, after over 11,000 flights were scrapped on Sunday — the highest daily total since the pandemic, according to data from aviation analytics firm Cirium.

Nearly 14pc of scheduled flights had been cancelled early on Monday morning, Cirium data showed.

Low pressure south of New England is expected to move east over the Atlantic, bringing heavy snow to parts of the northeast and freezing rain across sections of the Mid-Atlantic, the US National Weather Service said.

Experts at weather forecaster AccuWeather said the winter storm battering more than two dozen US states is expected to cause preliminary damage and economic losses of between $105 billion and $115bn.

The storm is set to become by far the costliest severe weather event since the Los Angeles-area wildfires, AccuWeather said.

American Airlines accounted for the largest share of disruptions on Monday, with nearly 900 flights canceled and about 600 delayed, followed by Republic Airways, JetBlue Airways and Delta Air Lines.

The disruptions also left thousands of travel plans in limbo. Passengers inundated carriers with queries on social media platforms to seek clarity on flight schedules.

United Airlines said it would begin restoring flights and was expecting significantly fewer cancellations on Monday. It had 282 cancellations as of Monday morning, according to FlightAware.

More disruptions likely

The Federal Aviation Administration said in an advisory that weather-related constraints, including snow, freezing rain and low visibility, were affecting major hubs such as Boston and the New York-area airspace.

The agency said ground stops and delay programs could be imposed through the afternoon at airports including LaGuardia, John F. Kennedy International, Philadelphia International, Newark Liberty International and Washington Dulles International if conditions worsen.

Airline operations are highly interconnected, meaning cancellations can leave aircraft and crews out of position, complicating efforts to restore normal flight schedules.

"The hotel cancellation rates for both USA and Canada has increased by 36% in the days running up to and during storm Fern," online hotel booking site HotelPlanner said.

The storm also hit cargo operations, with parcel delivery giant UPS saying severe weather may have disrupted services in some areas and warned of further impacts on its air network, including at its Louisville, Kentucky hub.

Railroads CSX and BNSF said last week they were also bracing for operational disruptions due to the storm.

The storm also impeded road travel. The Federal Emergency Management Agency warned that driving conditions could become dangerous as blizzard-like conditions, strong winds and ice spread further.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of customers across several US states, from Tennessee to the Carolinas, reported power outages.

More than 820,000 customers were without electricity as of early hours on Monday.—Reuters

UN fears hundreds of migrants missing after shipwrecks this month

ROME: Hundreds of migrants may be missing at sea or feared dead following reports of multiple deadly shipwrecks in the central Mediterranean in recent days, the UN's migration agency warned on Monday.

The International Organisation for Migration said it was "deeply concerned" by the reports, which it is currently verifying.

"Several boats are believed to have been involved over the past 10 days, with preliminary information suggesting that hundreds of people may be missing at sea or feared dead," a statement said.

The agency warned that severe weather was significantly hampering search and rescue operations.

Spokesman Jorge Galindo said there had been "three shipwrecks reported on Jan 23 and 25", with at least 100 deaths.

The reported wrecks involved boats that were believed to have departed from Tunisia and Libya, according to Merna Abdelazim, a data analyst with the IOM's Missing Migrants Project.

While IOM said it was still verifying the information, it said three deaths had been confirmed in Lampedusa, Italy, following a search and rescue operation involving a boat that had left from Sfax in Tunisia.

"Among the victims are twin girls, approximately one year old, who died of hypothermia shortly before disembarkation," the statement said, adding that a man had also died of hypothermia.

And survivors from the same operation had reported that another boat that departed from the same location at the same time as theirs had never arrived.

The agency was also investigating reports of nine missing boats that had departed Tunisia between January 14 and 21, with a total of around 380 people onboard, he said.

Another major tragedy

"In just the first weeks of 2026, hundreds of people are already feared to be missing," the IOM statement said, warning that "the final toll may be significantly higher".

"While IOM is still seeking official confirmation, the scale of the reported fatalities points to yet another major tragedy in the Central Mediterranean," the agency said.

The incidents, which occurred as Cyclone Harry hit the Mediterranean, "once again underscore the lethal consequences of migrant smuggling and trafficking networks that continue to operate with impunity, deliberately sending people to sea on unseaworthy and overcrowded boats", the agency said.

"Smuggling migrants on unseaworthy and overcrowded boats is a criminal act," it stressed.

"Arranging departures while a severe storm was hitting the region makes this conduct even more reprehensible, as people were knowingly sent to sea under conditions amounting to a near-certain risk of death," it added.

The latest incidents, it said, "highlight the urgent need for the international community to intensify efforts to dismantle these criminal networks and prevent further loss of life".

The IOM highlighted that the Central Mediterranean remains the deadliest migration corridor in the world, with at least 1,340 people losing their lives there last year alone.

Between 2014 and the end of 2025, more than 33,000 migrants died or went missing in the Mediterranean, according to the IOM's Missing Migrants Project.—AFP

Putting money first, cricket last

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the financial gravy train of international cricket, and it does not hold numerical sway at the ICC board. India first.

The second troubling aspect of this decision is the complete dismissal of the safety concerns of the Bangladesh team. The root of this row is the removal of Mustafizur Rahman from the IPL because of threats received promising disruption to matches that he would be involved in.

Now, if those safety concerns are credible enough to warrant his exit from an Indian tournament, then it doesn't seem too unreasonable of Bangladesh to have concerns about playing matches in India. Yet the ICC says that there are no valid safety concerns.

Unfortunately, nothing that the ICC says can be taken seriously given the absolute control that India holds over the ICC's operations. India would not wish for any team to refuse to play in India for security reasons — while India can withdraw or refuse to play in a country whenever it wishes.

Indeed, this hypocrisy is evident in international cricket for a number of years. Even during the years of Pakistan's exile from international cricket, security threats in other countries, including India, didn't matter to cricket's governing body. One rule for India and one rule for everybody else. India first.

The question that then remains is one of Pakistan's participation in the tournament. The answer I believe is a simple one. Pakistan should participate in the World T20 because it has already agreed to the terms of its participation — namely that it will play its matches in Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile, Pakistan should continue to support Bangladesh's cause within the ICC. Pakistan should continue to point out the hypocrisy in the treatment that it receives versus the treatment that India receives on the international stage. Pakistan should explain how the Bangladesh situation is another example of India first.

The shame here is that given the tumultuous decision that was taken, and given the significance of the governance crisis in the game, it is a matter that the world's cricket nations seem eager to ignore.

Where are the game's leading commentators? Where are the game's great cricketers? Where are the people who believe in the spirit of cricket? Where are guardians of cricket's moral galaxy when their voice is most needed? The answer is nowhere. Money talks. India first.

Assuming that the tournament does go ahead with Pakistan in it, we will inevitably see the ritual India Pakistan group contest. The fact that we cannot hold a world tournament without India and Pakistan playing a group match confirms the game's abdication to the business suits.

When it comes to money spinning international tournaments, politics and principles are quickly put to one side. What really matters is open for the world to see. What really matters is the revenue that the ICC and the Indian cricket board can make from a match against Pakistan.

Today, the governance of international cricket is in the gutter. The game is being destroyed by greed and political motivations. But who has the guts to stand up to this? More importantly, who can put a stop to it? The answer is nobody. The strategy is always India first because by putting India first the other nations also put themselves first.

As the bully bullies on, the world is too timid to take on the bully. Sound familiar?

Gunmen kill 11 in attack during football match in Mexico

SALAMANCA: Gunmen opened fire on football fans after a match in central Mexico, killing 11 people and injuring a dozen more in a region plagued by violence blamed on organized crime, local authorities said.

Armed men stormed into a community football ground after Sunday's match in Salamanca, a small city of 160,000 people in Guanajuato state.

The city said 10 people died on the scene, and another later in hospital.

Twelve people were wounded, including a woman and a child.

Mayor Cesar Prieto urged the national government to help "restore peace, tranquility, and security" in his community, blaming the violence on organized crime groups.

"We are going through a grave moment, a serious social breakdown. There are criminal groups trying to subdue the authorities," he said.

Also in Salamanca, four bags containing human remains were discovered on Saturday night, while in two nearby communities, six people were killed the same day.

Last week, there was a bomb threat at a Salamanca-based refinery of state oil company Pemex.

Guanajuato in central Mexico is a thriving industrial hub and home to several popular tourist destinations, but also the country's deadliest state due to gang turf wars, according to official homicide statistics.

Much of the violence in Guanajuato is linked to conflict between the Santa Rosa de Lima gang, which engages in oil theft, and the Jalisco New Generation drug cartel, one of the most powerful in the Latin American nation.

A manhunt was under way for the shooters.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has said Mexico's homicide rate in 2025 fell to its lowest level in a decade as a result of her administration's security strategy.— AFP

Nigeria to try army officers over coup plot

ABUJA: Nigeria's military said on Monday it will try several officers over an alleged plan to oust President Bola Tinubu last year, acknowledging a plot the government had initially denied.

In October, the military said 16 officers had been arrested over "issues of indiscipline".

Despite official denials, sources across the Nigerian government and military had said they were arrested over a coup plot.

If successful, this would have turned the clock back on a quarter-century of democracy.

"The armed forces of Nigeria wish to inform the general public that investigations into the matter have been concluded," Major General Samaila Uba, a spokesman for the Defence Headquarters, said in a statement Monday.

"The findings have identified a number of the officers with allegations of plotting to overthrow the government," he said.

"Those with cases to answer will be formally arraigned before appropriate military judicial panel to face trial." No date was given.

Shortly after denying the alleged coup plot, Tinubu reshuffled the country's top military brass.

A senior administration official said at the time: "Normally when such a thing happens, it means there is a gap in intelligence. No leader would accept that."

General Christopher Musa was dropped as chief of defence staff in the shuffle, though he has since come back as defence minister.

The west African country has seen several military takeovers in its history and spent much of the 20th century under junta rule since its independence from Britain.

It transitioned to civilian rule in 1999 and has had a democratic government since.

Hints of the affair first became public when Nigeria's Defence Headquarters issued a statement on October 4 on the arrest of 16 officers, on what it said were cases of indiscipline and perceived career stagnation.

Reports of a foiled coup later appeared in the Nigerian press.— AFP

Italy protests to Israel over police harassment

ROME: The Italian government summoned the Israeli ambassador to Rome on Monday after two of its police officers were threatened at gunpoint near Ramallah.

The two carabinieri officers, stationed at Italy's consulate general in Jerusalem, "were stopped in Palestinian territory, near Ramallah, probably by a 'settler' under the threat of an automatic rifle," a foreign ministry statement said.

Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani requested the ambassador be summoned "to seek clarification" and confirm Italy's "strong protest" over Sunday's incident, the ministry said.

Italy's embassy in Tel Aviv had lodged a formal protest over the incident, the ministry added.—AFP